

Response to "Theism or Atheism: Which Faith?"

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Everyone in this material world must have faith since we know nothing for absolute certainty. However, "faith" can have different meanings. Faith often means having confidence something can be trusted. Christian faith means to accept God and Jesus the Savior as the absolute truth.

Many Christians say they are in this world but not of this world. Christian faith and reason can describe what Christians consider not of this world. To understand what is both in and of this world requires facts, with evidence and reason.

Atheism is not a faith. It requires no faith to not believe in the existence of gods.

I can agree with Bullivant that people who believe themselves to be "created, loved, and supported by the deity" have a very different world view than that of non-believers.

However, instead of "wandering alone to create their destinies," nonbelievers usually join with others to achieve their personal and communal goals. These goals often include mutual support and aid. Nonbelievers utilize their human, genetically derived emotions of friendship, empathy, compassion, love, fairness, justice, etc.

Realizing there is no God to please, fear, or seek support from, they are forced to take joint responsibility for the well-being of life on this planet. At this time many, along with some theists, are struggling to overcome racism, police brutality, and our imminent climate and ecological disaster, which is promising to result in the sixth extinction of life on our planet.

Arguments for the Existence of God

Of all the arguments for the existence of God, only the Argument from Design was credible before Darwin. William Paley's argument in his *Natural Theology* was very convincing before Darwin's *On the Origin of the Species*.

Both Darwin and Dawkins appreciated Paley's logic. Darwin realized that his research would defeat it. He feared the effect his discoveries would have on English society and delayed publication for years. It's possible that, had he published it earlier, some Deists of that time may have dismissed all gods.

In 1986, before he was considered a "new" atheist, being concerned about the lack of understanding of evolutionary theory by the general public, Dawkins published *The Blind Watchmaker*. In Chapter 1, Dawkins writes,

Paley's argument is made with passionate sincerity and is informed by the best biological scholarship of his day, but it is wrong, gloriously and utterly wrong. The analogy between telescope and eye, between watch and living organism, is false. All appearances to the contrary, the only watchmaker in nature is the blind forces of physics, albeit deployed in a very special way. A true watchmaker has foresight: he designs his cogs and springs, and plans their

interconnections, with a future purpose in his mind's eye. Natural selection, the blind, unconscious, automatic process which Darwin discovered, and which we now know is the explanation for the existence and apparently purposeful form of all life, has no purpose in mind. It has no mind and no mind's eye. It does not plan for the future. It has no vision, no foresight, no sight at all. If it can be said to play the role of watchmaker in nature, it is the *blind* watchmaker.

I agree with Barash that had the initial conditions of our universe been different “by the smallest fraction, life as we know it would not have emerged.” What caused these initial conditions to be what they are is a mystery that physicists are still trying to solve. There are many mysteries that science has not yet solved. Advocates of creationism and intelligent design try to use these not-yet-explained mysteries to support the existence of a creator god. These attempts have been described as “God of the gaps” arguments. I wager that scientists will solve these mysteries before theologians or gods will.

With respect to the cosmological argument, the first cause that we know about was the big bang. If it had a cause, then we would need to know the cause of that cause, etc. If a deity were one of these causes we would still need to know the cause of that deity's creation and again on and on.

Morality and Atheism

Humans are born with feelings of concern for others. (See *Just Babies* by Paul Bloom and *Survival of the Friendliest* by Brian Hare and Vanessa Woods for related research.) These feelings are evolutionarily derived and experienced as emotions and are the closest thing we have to a foundation for moral values. Beyond this, our moral values develop through our interaction with others. Our inherent values provided for success in small, early human groups. As we developed language and our political groups became larger, our moral behavior changed to accommodate larger and larger groups. Evolution functions too slowly to keep up with our changing social and environmental conditions. In a free society, our common values change as necessary through discussion and dialog. Otherwise, they are dictated by the powerful. Values cannot be objectively fixed as both the physical and social environments necessarily change.

“New Atheists,” as defined in this article, do not believe that moral truths can be reduced to scientific truths about the natural world. The natural world is amoral. One “New Atheist” that might think that material science can determine morality may be Sam Harris. Morality is determined by philosophers, social scientists, and the agreement of the members of society.

The Problem of Evil

As an atheist, I cannot explain how believers understand why their infinitely good God designed and created a world with evil. Evil, willful immoral actions of human beings, is something we must confront and overcome as a society.

New Atheism

Having read Richard Dawkins early books and becoming enthused with evolutionary science, I discovered *The God Delusion* in the Seaford Library. When I discovered that a friend was also reading the book, we decided to ask the library to start a science and religion reading group. We met monthly to discuss our chosen book of the month with a librarian facilitating. We read the books by the "Four Horsemen" mentioned in the article in addition to other authors.

From 1995 until 2008 Richard Dawkins was Oxford's Professor for Public Understanding of Science. At that time Evangelicals, especially in the United States, were engaged in a campaign against belief in evolutionary science. Their demeaning of all science was having a negative effect on the necessary support of scientific projects. Also, fewer students were choosing scientific careers. It was while he had this position that Richard Dawkins wrote *The God Delusion*.

The label "New Atheists" appeared in an article in *Wired Magazine* in 2006. What made them "new" was the difference in their approach. Unlike other atheists, such as Stephen J Gould who advocated non-overlapping magisteria (that science and religion have separate domains), they opposed the teaching or spreading of any supernatural belief.

Conclusion: Faith, Reason and Science

Sadly, Christian Nationalists are attacking American secular society. Solving the dire problems before us requires critical thinking, reason, and science. These days, these qualities are being replaced with ignorance and strife. Our natural world is being destroyed for power, production, and consumption to support greed and profit.

No individual institutions – especially religious institutions – should have moral authority over the lives of others. This situation should not be tolerated in a society that values freedom and liberty.

Many of us who do not believe in the Christian God do not "just believe in the here and now." We are mortal and our existence will end with death. However, we are all also responsible to future generations to leave them with a planet that is capable of supporting their needs and their society. Hopefully, we will learn to work together towards these ends and realize that "faith in things not seen" will not save us or our children. I am very grateful for the good fortune of living before the extensive deterioration of our natural environment. I am ashamed and regret that my generation has destroyed so much that will be needed by our posterity.